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**MEDIA
ADVISORY**

AS FLU SEASON INTENSIFIES, LOCAL VA REQUESTS VISITOR RESTRICTIONS
Visitors Are Requested to Modify Their Visitations

For Immediate Release

LEBANON – October 15, 2014 –

- What:** As Flu Season Intensifies, Lebanon VA Medical Center Requests Self-Monitored Visitation Restriction
- Who:** Visitors, Vendors, Families and Friends of In-Patients and Out-Patients and the General Public
- When:** Immediately
- Where:** Announcement Involves the Medical Center and Six Community Outpatient Clinics

Background: Our community is experiencing increased cases of influenza infection. In order to protect Veteran-patients, guests, and staff from exposure to the influenza virus, Lebanon VA Medical Center requests that anyone who is currently ill, refrain from visiting the medical center. This is especially true for those who are experiencing a fever or elevated temperature, a sore throat or are coughing, sneezing, or sniffing.

The flu is an illness caused by flu viruses. The flu may make people cough and have a sore throat and fever. They may also have a runny or stuffy nose, feel tired, have body aches, or show other signs they are not well. The flu happens every year and is more common in the fall and winter in the U.S. People of all ages can get the flu, from babies and young adults, to the elderly.

People who have the flu can spread the virus by coughing or sneezing. Droplets released when a sick person coughs, sneezes, or talks can land in the mouths or noses of people who are nearby. The droplets can also be inhaled into the lungs. People may also catch the flu by touching their mouth or nose after touching something with the virus on it, such as doorknobs, tables, or an infected person's dirty hand.

Most people may be able to spread the flu from 1 day before showing symptoms to 5 to 7 days after symptoms begin. Severely ill persons or young children may be able to spread the flu longer.

During flu season, be prepared in case you get sick and need to stay home for a few days. Keep some over-the-counter medicines, alcohol-based hand rubs, tissues, and anything else you need so that you do not have to go out while you are sick. If you are really sick or have other

medical conditions or concerns, call your doctor. Your doctor will let you know if you need a flu test, flu treatment, or other care.

People who are not sick but have a sick family member at home with the flu can go to work as usual. Take simple steps such as washing your hands often with soap and warm water. If you cannot find soap and water, use an alcohol-based hand rub. Take these steps to prevent getting the flu from a sick family member.

Effective immediately:

Visitors who have been exposed to the flu, or who have symptoms of flu, are asked to refrain from visiting patients in the medical center or its six community based outpatient clinics.

Patients are discouraged from bringing children to their appointments with them.

Visitors to VA facilities in south central Pennsylvania are asked to comply with these requests to help protect already-vulnerable Veteran patients from flu-related illness, and to help our staff stay healthy and meet the community's healthcare needs. Since the onset of flu season, Lebanon VA Medical Center has been asking visitors who are sick to consider returning home and calling the patient instead, or connecting with the patient via email or social media.

Beyond this announcement, Lebanon VA offers the following additional tips to make the public's visits to the medical center as safe as possible for them and their loved ones:

- Always wash your hands upon entering and leaving the patient's room.
- Assess your own health before visiting the medical center; do not visit if you are at higher risk to contract infections.
- If the patient you are visiting has a contagious disease, consider calling instead.
- If you decide to visit a patient with a contagious illness, wear the protective items offered by the medical staff.
- Flu shots are widely available and effective. They are the best protection against flu. Veterans who receive their healthcare at the Lebanon VA Medical Center are encouraged to get their flu vaccinations to reduce their risk of contracting this serious and potentially fatal disease.
- Veterans may obtain their influenza vaccination two different ways. They may come to the medical center between 8:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m. and receive the vaccination in the Central Business Office in Building 17. Appointments are not necessary. Additionally, Veterans who have appointments with their primary care providers may receive the vaccination at their regularly scheduled appointment. Vaccinations are provided free of charge. Veterans are also strongly encouraged to tell their providers if they are ill and have recently traveled outside the United States within the past 30 days.

Media requests: All media requests, whether on weekdays or weekends, must be cleared through the Public and Community Relations Office. To arrange media coverage, contact Douglas A. Etter by calling 717-228-6079 or by cell at 717-926-3501. ###